# SOME ENGLISH NOVELS (1855-1917) THAT DEAL WITH THE CRIMEAN WAR

BY

ANNA BELLE LAUGHBAUM

A. B., Greenville College, 1943

A. M., University of Illinois, 1944

## AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH
IN THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1948

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# SOME ENGLISH NOVELS (1855-1917) THAT DEAL WITH THE CRIMEAN WAR

From the year of Balaclava and Inkerman when Charles Kingsley wrote *Westward Ho!* to arouse his country to patriotism, to 1917 when Sheila Kaye-Smith published *The Challenge to Sirius,* the Crimean War, in its historical, romantic, and moral aspects, has been treated by English novelists. In addition to its influence upon the novel, this war has had an effect upon English literature in general. In his *History of the English Novel* (VIII, 171-72), Ernest Baker emphasizes a certain virility in tone which the conflict gave to all English literature that was written in the second half of the nineteenth century. "It is not straining the point," he writes, "to trace some of the most striking contrasts between the literature before and after the eighteen-fifties to the immense moral force of this event." Baker then comments upon an undertone of strenuousness and struggle pervading the prose and poetry of the "most representative" of English writers following the war.

Stimulated by Baker's affirmations — this stimulation increased by Russia's position in the world today—I studied the English novels dealing with the Crimean War in an attempt to ascertain why a war which today is considered a blunder should have had such far-reaching effects upon English life as to warrant such statements from a leading literary historian. So far as I have been able to learn, the novels dealing with the Crimean War have not been treated before as a unit. In fact, with the exception of critical comments on Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* and an occasional review of three or four of the other war-novels, I have found surprisingly few references to these works. The attempt to describe and appraise the influence of the Crimean War upon England in terms of only one type of literature may have its limitations. But a study of thirty-

five novels, written by twenty authors over a period of sixty years, cannot help yielding results in depicting English life during and following the Crimean War.

My study begins with brief sketches of the social, political, and historical backgrounds of the war as they are depicted in the novels. It has also been concerned with seeing how completely and accurately the novelists describe the Crimean War itself and their reasons for employing it. A further consideration, and an important one, has been an attempt to discover the immediate results of the Crimean War upon the English people. I have given particular emphasis to the moral and religious results although I have also dealt briefly with the social and political ones. In connection with this problem of results I have discovered an interesting and significant bypath leading directly from the war, that "noble school of fiction," which title Henry James scoffingly gave to the "muscular" novelists. I have given no little time to a study of the muscular hero, for I believe he is an important link in Baker's theory that the Crimean War is an important element between the novel of manners and the novel of character and action. A chapter treating briefly the literary backgrounds of several of the more important novels and one on the general significance of the war-novels complete my study.

In discussing the more important of these problems, I should like to emphasize first the prominent treatment of the war itself. One can find a complete and detailed account of it in the war-novels. This completeness came about through the large amount of accurate information easily accessible to the novelists. No war in English history previous to the time of the Crimean invasion had been so definitely the center of attention at the home front as was this one. For the first time in British history public opinion was deeply stirred by the sufferings of the troops, the reason being that the public was better informed concerning the horrors of the Crimea than it had been about any previous

war. For the first time newspaper correspondents followed the campaign. William R. Russell, one of the war-novelists, was recognized as the first of war-correspondents and also the best. He published his vivid reports of the war in the *Times,* which by 1855 had approximately sixty thousand subscribers. The market was full of articles and historical essays about the war. Novelists now were provided with a new theme for fiction which would find a sure market. They could, and did, describe battallions and battles to their hearts' content until one of them, James Grant, was sure that his readers had become weary of the often-told tale. For this reason in some of his stories—*Laura Everingham* (1862) for example—he omitted nearly all events connected with the war except those which directly concerned his main characters.

The accounts of the Crimean War in the novels are, when the color of melodrama is disregarded, generally in accord with strictly historical records. A number of the novelists who had not themselves travelled in the East drew their information from oral reports and from historical accounts like William R. Russell's *The War* (1855) and A. W. Kinglake's *Invasion of the Crimea* (1863-1887). Henry Kingsley's accounts of Charles Ravenshoe's trip eastward and his descriptions of the battles of Alma and Balaclava are so vivid and convincing that Michael Sadleir would like to believe that Kingsley had been there in person. S. M. Ellis remarked that Kingsley's accounts "entirely agree" with those of his father, who had fought in the Crimean War. *Between Two Thieves* (1912), Richard Dehan's powerful story of the war, was pronounced worthy of taking rank with the greatest war-stories of any period or country.

Some of the Crimean War novelists used the war in their novels for a didactic purpose. Charles and Henry Kingsley saw in the conflict the awakening of the English people to the "stern realities" of life, and they wrote *Two Years Ago* (1857), the title alluding to the war-time, and *Ravenshoe*

(1862), to sharpen the consciences of their countrymen. Feeling as he did that novels should embody sermons and convinced that the Crimean War had taught many lessons, Charles Kingsley could do no better than to record some of them. Through suffering, his heroes lose their old hardness and become sympathetic. Similar changes can be seen in the main characters in James Grant's *Under the Red Dragon* (1875), George Melville-Whyte's *The Interpreter* (1858), and Flora A. Steele's *Marmaduke* (1917).

Several of the war-novelists seemed to find the color and drama of the East during the war particularly fascinating. Mrs. Yelverton (Maria Longworth) opens her novel *Martyrs to Circumstances* in Stamboul where the heroine is one of the Sisters of the Propaganda. The wife of a regimental hero lodges with the Sisters and relates the story, centering it in the love of a novice for a captain in the Crimean War. Melville-Whyte and Russell capitalized upon the romantic and melancholy atmosphere of the East by describing unusual scenes. The former novelist, during the war a major in the Turkish irregular Cavalry, profited by his experience and gave to his readers bits of information about Turkish customs on which he felt the English were misinformed. A Turkish harem, for example, was among his subjects for discussion in *The Interpreter*. In this novel and in *Vera*, a story of a Russian princess and an English earl, and in others, the authors described scenes in which, in many instances, neither reader nor writer had mingled.

Several of the novelists used the Crimean conflict in other ways than the two mentioned: In *Guy Livingstone* (1857), *Sword and Gown* (1859), and *Hagarene* (1874), George Lawrence expounded his pagan philosophy of the senses. The great political drama of three nations intrigued Richard Dehan, author of *Between Two Thieves* (1912). The *vie de province* during the war years interested Walter Besant more than did the actual conflict. In collaboration with James Rice, he wrote excellent character-sketches.

A second significant feature of the Crimean War novels is their treatment of the "muscular" hero. During the war and for a decade following it the school of muscularity flourished in England. From that time onward the doctrine of physical force, which this school preached, appeared in the literature of the remainder of the century. "Never was it taught with more acceptance than with the advent of Kipling," according to Ernest Baker. Although this gospel of muscularity was in evidence before the Crimean War, it did not receive the emphasis or gain popularity in fiction until the war-years. It became important as the importance of the individual man became more evident. This did not take place until a crisis brought it about. Now active energy and a quick eye were in greater demand than profound reflection and a thoughtful brain. Long before the Crimean War, the "prophets" of England were aware of the need of recognizing the worth of their countrymen in terms of both individuality and usefulness. England as a whole, however, did not seem to become aware of the need until the war when the value of human life was impressed upon her and a more democratic spirit pervaded the country. This levelling influence resulted in a new kind of hero coming to the front, a hero who represented the results of a combined physical and mental education. Tom Thurnall, a doctor in *Two Years Ago,* Amyas, the undaunted Hercules of *Westward Ho!,* Frank Leigh, the muscular preacher of *Geoffrey Hamlyn,* and Doctor Brady of *The Adventures of Dr. Brady* are only a few of the strong, learned heroes in the war-novels. Even a twentieth-century novel, *The Coil of Carne,* contains three muscular heroes who stand out prominently.

I have described at length the muscular heroes of the war-novels, and, in order to give an idea of the large role this type of character plays in the fiction following the war-years, have also treated representative heroes in a few novels not directly on the war. The most important of these are *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) ; *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) ; *Austin Elliot* (1863) ; *The Hillyars and the Burtons*

(1865); *Kenelm Chillingly* (1873-4).

The "trends of the times"—social, political, and religious—are, no doubt, important in considering the significances of the war-novels. The social world of England at the date of the Crimean War is described in *Ravenshoe* (1862). A concise but apt statement describing the tenor of those years is Charles Kingsley's remark in *Two Years Ago* (1857); "these fly-away new times, when young ones choose their own husbands, and their own politics, and their own hounds too." The characters in the war-novels reflect English opinion concerning entertainment, professions, education, class-consciousness, and the new woman movement.

Since the average Englishman of that day was interested in vigor of body, the war-novelists describe at some length the games and sports of the period. They fill their stories with reports of sculls and university matches. "Prone to create rather than to avoid bodily peril," their characters engage in hard riding and hunting. Geoffrey Hamlyn (*Geoffrey Hamlyn*) expressed the sentiment of his generation when he said that cock-fighting and horse-racing were activities "which all young fellows worth anything are pretty sure to indulge in."

The Crimean War novels show the attitude of the English people toward professions. Prevailing opinion held that England was not the place for poor men with any "go" in them. The army was not alluring to men who had no one to buy promotions for them. The church was commonly thought of as the vocation for those with little initiative; "And when you have got your precious first," Charles Ravenshoe told Marston when the latter became ill through over-exertion, "you will find yourself utterly unfit for any trade or profession except the church." Men were seeking, however, to free the ministry from this stigma by painting in their novels portraits of strong, capable preachers.

Another important social implication of the war-novels

is in reference to the educational question, both in its narrower and broader aspects. It is particularly revealing in those dealing with muscularity. Some of the novels treat the philosophy of education; others give opinions on particular courses of instruction; still others point out the evils of formal education. Many of the novelists regard war as an educating process. The Crimean War, as far as I have been able to ascertain from novels, had no direct bearing upon the educational problem. There were, as early as the 1850's, some notions about a "practical" education. A change did take place in the 1870's, but apparently the war was not a cause. The importance of the discussion lies in the airing of various theories and methods of education rather than in the revelation of new material.

Likewise, the novelists were conservative in their discussion of classes. Titled Englishmen commanded a profound respect. Men should not seek to rise out of their classes. For the most part, this subject of class distinctions was not made an issue in the war-novels. The reader can find few definite allusions to any levelling movement among the classes. The levity with which some of the novelists treat the peerage and the aristocrats would indicate, however, a slackening in the rigidity of class boundary lines. That the war did have an influence upon the levelling of class distinctions was Henry Kingsley's opinion. Still, it is a question just how much of the immediate levelling influence of the Crimean War lingered on.

The war-novels throw light upon another interesting aspect of social England, that of the "New Woman" movement. One heroine declares, "We are not meant to sit in fine silks, and look pretty, and spend money." Another asks, "Is a woman to have no duty, no work to do in the world?" "Are not the 'roses dipped in silk' going out of fashion just now?" is the comment of another. These expressions and others are typical of the rising sentiment toward woman's rightful place. An early, but a very important, pioneer in

the Woman's Movement was Florence Nightingale, considered by the world as the greatest figure in the Crimean War. One can see in the novels both the *pros* and *cons* concerning this movement.

For the most part, the political discussions in the war-novels consist in fault-finding against the Coalition ministry for its blunders in carrying on the war. From G. A. Henty, whose juvenile war-story *Jack Archer* contains comments upon the English people quietly allowing the "cheese-paring politicians" to cut down the army and navy to a drastic point, to the military novelist James Grant, who cited the example of a single surgeon on board a hospital ship of four hundred men as evidence of "Whig parsimony", the novelists took up the theme of a government at fault. The causes of the war are also discussed as well as the political results. The majority of the novelists blame Russia for starting the war.

Religion plays an important part in the war-novels. The mixture of zeal and indifference in the religion of the army was indicative of England's spiritual condition during the middle years of the nineteenth century. This general statement can be qualified by a study of the characters in the war-novels. The feeling against the dissenting groups was strong among the members of the less fervent parties. Charles Kingsley expressed this feeling in *Two Years Ago,* which is severe in its condemnation of the Evangelicals. The different "parties" in the Anglican Church are discussed rather objectively. There is manifest, however, an uneasy feeling concerning the inroads of Catholicism. This faith plays an important part in several of the novels—*Ravenshoe, Westward Ho!,* and *Between Two Thieves.*

There are also innumerable references to individual opinions and beliefs concerning religion which help to reveal the religious trends of the time. They range all of the way from a religion of duty to the acceptance of the "Whatever is, is right" theory, from a religion of physical strength to a

creed of works without faith. The novelists' treatment of preachers reveals, for the most part, the desire to consider them from the soldier's point of view, for during the Crimean War special attention was given to the interests of the fighting men.

The general tone of the war-novels with respect to internationalism is also important. As a whole the Victorian novel is thought to be insular. The war-novels, however, although plainly revealing their authors' love for their country, give little space to English insularity. The novelists could see the faults of England and the superiorities of foreign countries. The war-novels show a definite weakening in English provincialism. There is a possibility that these novels influenced later novelists whose works are characterized by tolerant attitudes.

The war-novels must also have had a general educational effect upon a people who were to become more and more involved in Persia, China, and Africa, and with peoples of all races and countries. In conjunction with the non-fictional literature of the time, they gave a practical view of the East in the place of the poetical view which Western people had held. In the late 'eighties and 'nineties this attitude is reflected in a wave of Indian novels—Mrs. Steele's, for example.

The Crimean War novels were, for the most part, representative Victorian novels. The particular concern of their authors seems to be with "public" as opposed to "private" life. The widespread criticism of ineffective war-management is indicative of this concern. The treatment of such subjects as education, religion, and the Woman's Movement certainly marks the novels as, at least, attempts in employing fiction as a vehicle for serious social problems. It is true that these subjects were subordinate to the theme of the war. This fact probably can be explained by saying that the war attracted the attention and provided subject matter and a market for some rather minor talents who probably would

not have been able to manage successfully broad, universal themes. Many of the war-stories suffer from too much melodrama and didacticism. Their authors lack the percipience of a George Eliot in character portrayal; nevertheless, they represent in their novels a self-conscious effort to give to nineteenth-century readers the drama of a two years' war against a background of English life.

## VITA

Anna Belle Laughbaum was born in Galion, Ohio, March 14, 1915. She received her elementary and secondary training at Pellston, Michigan, and Harbor Springs High School, respectively. She was graduated from the Fort Wayne Bible Institute in 1941. In 1943 she received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Greenville College, Greenville, Illinois. She was appointed Scholar in English at the University of Illinois and in June, 1944, the Master of Arts degree was conferred upon her. She was appointed Fellow for the years 1944-45 and 1945-46. In the fall of 1946 she accepted a position as teacher of English and Greek on the faculty of Bethany Peniel College, Bethany, Oklahoma, where she is at the present time.